DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 063 220 SO 003 044

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Thompson, Hugo W. |
| TITLE | High School Philosophy. Report of a Feasibility Study, 1968-1971. CSCA - Carnegie Philosophy Project. |
| INSTITUTION | Central States Coll. Association, Rock Island, Ill. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y. |
| PUB DATE | 71 |
| NOTE | 4p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Central States College Association, 1308 20th Street, Rock Island, Illinois 61201 (No Charge) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29 |
| DESCRIPTORS | Course Descriptions; Course Evaluation; Course Objectives; *Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Research; *High School Curriculum; *Humanities Instruction; *Philosophy; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; Projects; Secondary Grades; Student Attitudes; Suburban Schools; Teacher Qualifications; Urban Schools |
| IDENTIFIERS | *CSCA Carnegie Philosophy Project |

ABSTRACT

This document is a summary report on a three-year project (1968-71) to determine the feasibility of high school philosophy courses. Two high schools in the Chicago inner city and eight in the suburbs were selected to participate. Representatives of the schools participated in the selection of project teachers. The staff aimed to discover what philosophical literature students could read profitably, whether they could pursue philoscphical questions, how much they could improve in philosophical critical thinking, and how they would respond to various teaching methods. Different course patterns developed, however, "dialectic discussion" came to be the basic procedural element in the instructional process. The teacher functioned as guide, resource, counselor, and model. All project teachers had preparation beyond the Masters degree, with majors in philosophy. Project evaluations included student responses, independent analyses, administrator and staff appraisals. Some conclusions: 1) feasibility of teaching philosophy in high school has been demonstrated; 2) benefits to students are various, highly personal, and difficult to measure; and, 3) teacher qualifications are particularly important. Certain recommendations are made based on these conclusions. (SO 002 723 is related.) (Author/JLB)

ED 063220
SP 003 044

# HIGH SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

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## Report Of A Feasibility Study, 1968-71
## Conducted by the Central States College Association

*by Hugo W. Thompson, Project Director*

Philosophy has been an old tradition in the secondary school curriculum of some European and South American countries. In the United States it has been taught in several preparatory and Catholic schools, but only sporadically in public high schools, where it has depended upon the initiative of a concerned teacher.

Conversations beginning in 1965 led to a three-year project during 1968-71 to determine the feasibility of high school philosophy courses, conducted by the Central States College Association under a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. A project director was engaged, two high schools in the Chicago inner city and eight in the suburbs were selected to participate, and an advisory committee was formed to assist in selection and guidance of the staff. Representatives of the high schools participated in the selection of the six project teachers and their assignment, mostly on a one-semester basis.

### Project Schools and Teachers

| High School | 1968-69 | 1969-70 | 1970-71 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Deerfield | James Parejko | James Otteson | Paul Bosley |
| Evanston | Douglas Larson | Doris Meyers | John Birmingham |
| Highland Park | James Parejko | James Otteson | Paul Bosley |
| Hyde Park | Charles Hollenbeck | Douglas Larson | Douglas Larson |
| Lake Forest | Sr. Dolores Dooley | Doris Meyers | John Birmingham |
| Lyons Township | Paul Bosley | Paul Bosley | Caleb Wolfe |
| New Trier East | Hugo Thompson | Carolyn Sweers | Carolyn Sweers |
| New Trier West | Hugo Thompson | Carolyn Sweers | Carolyn Sweers |
| Oak Park | Douglas Larson | Charles Hollenbeck | Charles Hollenbeck |
| St. Mary | Charles Hollenbeck | Charles Hollenbeck | Charles Hollenbeck |

### Selection and Advisory Committee

**Dr. Peter Caws,** City University of New York, formerly a consultant with the Carnegie Corporation.

**Dr. John Linnell,** Professor of Philosophy and Provost, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

**Dr. Ruth Barcan Marcus,** Professor of Philosophy, Northwestern University, Evanston

**Dr. Donald Reber,** Superintendent of Lyons Township High School, La. Grange, Illinois

**The Project Director** (1968-69, Sr. Dolores Dooley, BVM; 1969-71, Hugo W. Thompson)

**The Executive of CSCA** (1968, Pressley McCoy; 1968-69, Lloyd Bertholf; 1969-71, Francis C. Gamelin)

### Objectives

The purpose of the project was to determine whether or not philosophy could be taught in high school in a manner both professionally respectable to philosophers and personally helpful to students. The courses were designed for a wide variety of students, not just the college bound. The staff aimed to discover what philosophical literature students could read with profit, whether they could grasp and pursue philosophical questions, how much they could improve in philosophical critical thinking, and how they would respond to various methods of teaching. The staff sought to help the students move from simple emotive responses toward consciously critical analysis of assumptions, arguments and alternatives; to deepen their sensitivity to the range of values; to give them better tools for making value judgments and organizing values; and to provide a context for growth in self-knowledge.

In March 1969 these objectives were formulated as follows:

1. To encourage students to inquire analytically and persistently into issues relevant to their personal lives and to problems of the world.
2. In the course of this inquiry to:
   a. Pursue questions beyond the descriptive level to the examination of assumptions, to clear and logical statement of arguments, and to grounds for rational dialogue.
   b. Identify basic philosophical issues and openly discuss them.
   c. Use philosophical schools and thinkers holding views relevant to the issues discussed.
   d. Equip students for examination of their own values, together with those of their society, through reflection, criticism and argument.
   e. Examine alternative methods of personal decision making.
   f. Develop such arts and skills as listening, fairness, and appreciation for complexity of issues; suspension of judgment during inquiry; and patient persistence in pursuit of answers.
3. To explore, through all the activities of this program, the function of philosophy in the high school curriculum.

### Staff

The project director was responsible for recruitment of teacher-candidates and preparation of information about them for the selection process; regular consultation with staff members and other high school personnel; preparation for staff meetings and followup; contacts and clearances with CSCA colleges, philosophers, and related committees; consultations with educational and philosophical organizations regarding development of standards for high school philosophy; publicity and consultations directed toward wider use of high school philosophy; collection of materials and reports from teachers; preparation of reports on the project; and development of plans and proposals for continuing projects.

The director worked with six teachers. Their responsibilities included half-time philosophy teaching, availability to other classes as a visiting lecturer, participation in project staff meetings, and study or research. Their teaching patterns and experiences were shared at staff meetings and in reports written at the end of each semester. During the third year of the project they worked with local teachers chosen to carry on the course after the project.

### Teaching Patterns

Since each teacher was responsible for creating his course and adapting it to his students and community within the broad objectives of the program, discernibly different course patterns developed. What began as necessity soon became a common conviction, that philosophy should be pursued as a living process rather than content to be "covered."

**Readings.** Some structured the course around selected readings. Others built around selected topics or questions. These two approaches were closely interrelated because readings were selected with a definite major question in mind. In the classroom, the readings approach asked students to note the argument carefully, be able to state the author's concerns, show the relevance of the author's points today, and examine the argument itself for validity and usefulness.

**Topics.** Courses built around topics left selection of issues to be determined by class discussion in the first sessions of the semester, or varied time schedules for particular topics in relation to student response. Those using this approach tended to develop courses dealing with the nature of the self, man's relation to society, and ethical-religious-metaphysical questions.

**Life Styles.** Another approach was to present a few life styles for examination and comparison. Selection of materials here came partly from student suggestion and partly from teacher interest. Examples of philosophical positions associated with these life styles were: Idealism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, Scientific and Analytic, Marxist, Mysticism.

**Open Process.** In the open process approach the emphasis all semester was on great flexibility and adjustment to student response. This did not mean simply discussing what students liked, but attention to topics and materials which the instructor and class together saw as significant for meaningful human living today. The topics discussed included human freedom, the meaning of life, the nature of good, logic and reasoning processes, minds and computers, demands of society, protest, limits of knowledge, the meaning of God.

These typical approaches show varieties of emphasis. Not mutually exclusive, they tended to consider many of the same questions in the end.

## Classroom Procedures

The necessarily experimental and self-critical experiences of a feasibility study led to a fresh examination of the classroom and its processes as well as of philosophy and its potentialities.

**Doing Philosophy.** The success of a classroom must be measured by what the student takes away as development of his personality through expansion of his information and of his attitudes and skills. Therefore the project teachers all came to see their task as that of "doing philosophy" rather than "presenting" various philosophers and their ideas. This meant critical, rational appraisal of issues and alternatives in depth and in an open spirit. Understanding of the logical structures of arguments, skill in following logical procedures, knowledge of the views of great thinkers and of how they came to these views all became essential tools of doing philosophy.

**Dialectic Discussion.** The staff came to speak of "dialectic discussion" as the basic procedural element in the process. The term was used to refer to reflective interaction of persons and ideas in conversational communication. Essential to this dialectic were (a) listening for meanings behind phrases, feeling the full force of the question or implied commitment, and (b) a mood of mutuality, sharing the effort to discover satisfying answers or solutions. Interdependent operational elements were the questions and comments of students, readings, leadership and participation of the teacher, and prepared papers or projects brought into the exchange. Such dialectic discussion involved much more free and total participation than the question and answer format common in classrooms. It was less formal and more broadly exploratory than debate. It was not a program of psychological sensitivity training though it may have had some similar benefits.

In the dialectic context the teacher needed to discover and give careful attention to the background and needs of individual students, helping them to grow in knowledge and outlook. Readings gave depth and insight. "Handout" statements on background or resources related readings to class interests. Lectures were transformed into short comments pertinent to the discussions at hand but pointing to wider implications. Student projects were not just duty exercises but became parts of a mutual sharing and exploring process. Even tests became interesting, creative, and educational experiences.

**Class Size.** Class size was important to effectiveness, with about 20 students preferred. Where school policy demanded larger classes, classes were divded into sections meeting on alternate days with students spending some periods in the library on individualized projects.

**Rhythm of Work.** A cycle or rhythm of kinds of work—technical, expository, and highly personal—helped keep the class alive. Alternative views compelled thought, but students needed help to see extreme views as related and not simply separate, and too many variants became confusing. To balance continuity and depth with variety for effective doing of philosophy the teacher had to be very sensitive to moods of eagerness or impatience in a class.

The open dialectic approach had surprising stimulation for all, according to student evaluations, but especially for two groups. Able students who had been frustrated by routinized studies did remarkable work (e.g. reports and term papers) with a great sense of release. At the same time, many nonachievers and near drop-outs were intrigued back into serious study-in-depth of individualized projects.

## Reading Materials

**Initial Choices.** The readings first tried in the project tended to be tested introductory material in philosophy (e.g. Plato) or thought-provoking literature with high contemporary interest (e.g. Frankl: **Man's Search for Meaning**). Student reactions and suggestions helped expand original lists, but each teacher had his own favorites.

**Second Year.** In the second year, all agreed to use certain classics, each in ways that fit the context of his own course plans. The following were chosen: Plato: **The Apology, Crito,** and the story of the cave in **The Republic;** Aristotle: **Ethics,** books I and II; Descartes: **Meditations** I and II; and some Existentialist writing. Of course, each added to this list. A guide was revised for reporting on uses and responses for each reading.

**Third Year.** By the third year a list of books tried by two or more teachers was prepared, and most teachers had extensive lists to suggest to students for study of special topics. It was apparent to all that there was serious need for an adequate introduction to logic, but there was no common enthusiasm for any of the works now available. In both the second and third year there developed extensive use of "handouts." These were reproductions for class use of excerpts or condensations from classical works, contemporary popular articles, materials written by the teacher relevant to topics under discussion, even student reports. The style and fervor of the teacher had a noticeable influence on the effectiveness of particular readings.

**Audio-Visual Aids.** Where finance and facilities permitted, project staff members found audio-visual aids of help, but also noted that material relevant to high school philosophy is very limited. Films used most helpfully were: "Night and Fog," "No Exit" (Sartre), "Socrates," and "Aristotle."

## The Teacher

**Guide.** In dialectic discussion the teacher was both intermediary and key to the interaction of student, teacher, and readings. Teachers launched the discussion, held it to the point, suggested references, presented alternative views, and called for prepared reports.

**Resource.** The teacher was a sharing participant in discussion and also a guide to resources and a resource in himself. In working with high school libraries the staff found it helpful to develop lists of suggestions for library orders and to employ various devices to encourage students in use of the library. Teachers often needed to help students see the implications, alternatives and applications of issues or materials under discussion. Here current clippings and articles were of great help.

**Counselor.** All teachers tend to become counselors, but the open yet serious dialectic of the philosophy classes accentuated this role. The self-confrontation in class disturbed some students; it released others to new creativity.

**Model.** The philosophy teacher may not have been an ideal personality worthy of emulation in all respects, but in fact he did become a model. Because philosophy is so hard to define, the teach-

ers conveyed its meaning and significance by what they were and did, perhaps more than in other fields. In class and out, the teacher had to demonstrate those characteristics of scholarship, empathic communication, creative critical thought, capacity to accept criticism of strongly-held views and values, and honest search for answers in depth that he wished students to develop.

**Visiting Lecturer.** Since teachers in many subject fields are aware of philosophical issues and implications in many matters that arise in their courses, project staff were invited as visiting lecturers in a wide variety of classes. Concern about this problem led three members of the project to make detailed suggestions for a graduate level course for general high school teachers to help them deal more accurately and helpfully with these questions. Many schools are concerned about the need for interdisciplinary linkage, and project staff members both participated in and helped to plan such courses.

## High School Philosophy As A Profession

**Interest.** Correspondence with the project director indicated widespread interest on the part of high school administrators in philosophy. Most schools in the project found ways to continue philosophy from their own budgets in spite of financial limitations. Many found teachers with good qualifications already on the faculty in some other field. Some schools looked for and found a philosophy qualification in new teachers normally added to the staff.

**Qualifications.** All teachers in this project had preparation beyond the Masters degree with majors in philosophy. Local teachers who will follow the project will average less preparation, but they will have undergraduate majors or more in the field. Essential qualifications were much discussed in staff meetings of the project with these results:

1. The philosophical background required for competence as a high school teacher in the field is essentially that of a major in a broad-based college department plus some advanced work. Masters-level preparation should be the norm.
2. At the present time, when philosophy is just being introduced in high school and full-time philosophy teaching is the exception rather than the rule, the teacher probably will have to be qualified in an additional subject. Also, because it is still unusual for states to certify in philosophy, it might be easier for prospective high school philosophy teachers to get their required secondary teaching certificates in their other subjects.

**Recognition.** A resolution on high school philosophy, adopted at the Western Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in May 1971, calls attention to growth in the field, offers cooperation in establishing and maintaining high standards, and calls attention to the machinery of placement. Such recognition of philosophers by the professional organization is important to stabilization of status as details of participation in the APA are worked out together with recognition by other standardizing bodies.

## Teacher Certification In High School Philosophy

Colleges which consider developing a high school philosophy certification program should note two special factors:

1. There must be a place and adequate supervision for student teaching.
2. There must be qualified leadership for instruction in materials and methods.

Both of these suggest that a college philosophy department begin consultation with some receptive neighboring high school and also with someone experienced in high school philosophy, such as the staff of the Center for High School Philosophy. It may be wise for a member of the college staff to teach high school philosophy for a year or two to get first-hand acquaintance with what is involved and to qualify for leadership and supervision of future teachers. He will also learn much that will be helpful for his college teaching.

## Evaluations

The objectives formulated in March 1969 provided direction for various evaluations of the project. These evaluations included student responses, independent analyses, administrator's appraisals, and staff appraisals.

**Student Responses.** From the beginning, there were more requests for enrollment than could be accommodated with available staff. In 1968-69 there were 527 students, in 1969-70 there were 681, and in 1970-71, 682 students. Since philosophy continues under local teachers in 1971-72 it is significant to note that preliminary registrations in the spring of 1971 totalled 790.

Questionnaires were given students at the end of each course, and a similar though abbreviated questionnaire was sent to some students one and two years later. The course was rated highly compared to other high school work because there was opportunity to pursue "relevant" questions in depth and with freedom of expression. Students declared that they learned to think more carefully and logically, to examine their own ideas more objectively, and to have more respect for other persons and for differing views. They gained understanding about foundational ideas of our culture. Readings were more difficult than in other courses, but in general philosophy was not too difficult, and the challenge was often appreciated. A high percentage were stimulated toward further study in philosophy. The most frequent complaints were brevity of the course and the presence of some disinterested students.

Oral discussions with groups of students shortly after taking the course yielded similar results with strong emphasis on growth in ability to listen to ideas of fellow students and to give these ideas friendly but critical examination. The personality and methods of the teacher were very large factors in the helpfulness of the course. Well-led discussion was much more helpful than lectures or reciting from books.

Questionnaires were sent in 1971 to 627 students who had participated in 1968-69 and 1969-70 classes. Replies were received from 253. Their overall impact was very similar to that of the questionnaires given at the close of each semester. On some points there were strong negative reactions, usually balanced by affirmatives at the same points. Best features of the philosophy course, according to former students, were sharing ideas and learning to respect opinions of others. The most frequent complaint was that some students did not take the class seriously enough.

**Independent Analyses.** Educational Testing Service was engaged to identify changes in the students taking philosophy during the first semester of 1970-71 at seven schools. Two devices, student essays describing personal decision-making incidents and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, were used at the beginning and end of the semester. Resistance to the testing process by many students, especially at the end of the semester, created serious problems. Results were scored nevertheless.

Results from the decision essays were ambiguous. The majority showed no significant change, while in all but two schools fewer students showed significant improvement than showed decrease on a decision-making measure. Some of the factors that may have contributed to this negative result were: (a) one semester is not enough, (b) pre-test scores averaged high, giving little room for quick improvement, (c) test-taking motivation was lower at the close than at the beginning of the semester, and (d) the essays and the method of obtaining them did not capture changes.

On the other hand, results with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator suggest that many students markedly increased their capacity and appreciation for introspection, their openness toward various viewpoints, their appreciation of analysis over feeling as a basis for judgment, their freedom in self-expres-

sion, and perhaps their cynicism toward romantic interpretations.

In March 1971 Dr. Gerald Brekke and three students from Gustavus Adolphus College observed the philosophy classes with the help of Flanders' Interaction Analysis Instrument and interviewed students and staff. They concluded that the philosophical content and the style of teaching lent themselves to much more significant student-talk than in traditional classes, that they were influential in the affective domain as well as the cognitive, and that, even at inner city schools, students were doing philosophy and were not inhibited by its difficulty.

Thus, there is some evidence from independent appraisals that project classes in philosophy led students to exercise their minds systematically and taught them to think.

**Administrators' Appraisals.** Administrators in the various schools were asked for their judgments about the program, based on reports of counselors, faculty, and other reflected impressions. Their judgments were uniformly favorable. In every case but one, where special local conditions were involved, they planned to continue philosophy in the curriculum. All recommended it to other schools. They foresaw competition among new electives for student time and some fears in the community that students would learn to question everything rather than accept the advice of their elders. They expressed concern about a continuous supply of well-prepared instructors.

**Staff Appraisals.** The staff undertook vigorous self-examination at regular bimonthly meetings. Based on their direct contacts with individual students, class discussions, and papers, the teachers affirmed vigorously that philosophy affords unique opportunities for student growth in self-analysis, human awareness, rational approaches to problems, and general critical judgment.

In summation, it may be said there were few dramatic changes in rational behavior. But many students realized they had entered new ways of looking at people, ideas, arguments, and problems. They saw these effects as coming from the open spirit of the teacher, the readings, and the class discussion, such that questions and concerns suppressed elsewhere were here taken seriously. They learned how to listen, to interact helpfully, and to explore tension issues rationally in depth. Some informational learning about philosophers and philosophical ideas took place, but the more significant outcome was satisfying participation in the philosophical process itself.

## Conclusions

The evaluations from different sources seem consistent with one another and with this report as a whole, so the following conclusions seem appropriate:

1. The feasibility of teaching philosophy in high school has been demonstrated.
2. Benefits to students are various, highly personal, and difficult to measure objectively.
3. High school students find philosophical readings difficult but challenging and rewarding.
4. The qualifications of the teacher are more than usually important.
5. A great deal of curriculum research and development must be done.

## Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusions of the project, the following recommendations are made:

1. That high schools introduce philosophy into the curriculum as soon as the necessary conditions can be met.
2. That persons interested and qualified to become high school philosophy teachers prepare to teach a second subject also.
3. That colleges and universities prepare high school philosophy teachers with a realistic eye to the job market.
4. That a Center be established to produce appropriate curriculum materials, field-test materials and methods, advise high schools and teacher-training institutions, and provide a clearinghouse for information related to high school philosophy.

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This study was made possible by funds granted by Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the project staff.

A full report of the study is available in a 175-page paper-bound edition for $2.00 from the Central States College Association, 1308 - 20th Street, Rock Island, Illinois 61201.

## CENTER FOR HIGH SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

### Announcement

As an outgrowth of the three-year feasibility study reported above, a Center for High School Philosophy has been organized with initial support and administrative services from the Central States College Association.

### Advisory Committee

**Vernon E. Anderson,** Professor of Education, University of Maryland

**James Jarrett,** Professor, Philosophy of Education, University of California, Berkeley

**John V.S. Linnell,** Professor of Philosophy and Provost, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

**Ruth Barcan Marcus,** Professor of Philosophy, Northwestern University

**Donald R. Reber,** Superintendent of Schools, Lyons Township, La Grange, Illinois

### Center Program

**Publications.** A **Center Newsletter** and **Occasional Papers** will be published regularly. Articles and news notes may be addressed to the editor.

**Research.** Teaching materials and methods will be prepared and field-tested.

**Conferences.** A high school philosophy conference in spring 1972 will be the first in a series.

**Consultations.** The Center director and associates will provide consultative services at modest fees.

**Seminars.** Seminars led by experienced high school philosophy teachers will be held in cooperation with colleges and universities.

### Staff

**Hugo W. Thompson,** Director

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West Coast

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